



Sharon Farrell

History

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There may not have been many female history professors when Sharon Farrell, History instructor at Florida Keys Community College, first entered college. Fortunately that didn't stop her from chasing her dream and doing her part to shift the historical gender gap among history teachers.

"I couldn't be a history major because women were only allowed in the school of nursing or education, said Farrell who has taught at FKCC since 2005. "I had to go to the school of education as a secondary teacher, so I could take history courses with men."

Since then Farrell has earned a bachelor's degree in Sociology, a master's degree in History, and completed significant coursework toward a doctorate in History. Not to mention raising a family in between. She now leads the college's Social Sciences and Art programs and teaches American History, World History: the Holocaust, and Oral and Community History.

Her passion for history reaches beyond the scope of the classroom and into the local community. She served as a liaison with the Truman Little White House Museum for the 2008 Truman Symposium. She worked with Congresswoman Ileana Ros-Lehtinen's office to bring the Holocaust Survivor Tour to the Keys last spring. She was also at the forefront of the team that earned a grant from the American Library Association (ALA) and National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) that enabled the FKCC Library to host the traveling exhibition, *Lincoln: The Constitution and the Civil War*, earlier this year.

Farrell is again collaborating with Juana Careaga of the Library on their second ALA/NEH grant-funded project: *Let's talk about it: Making Sense of the American Civil War*. The program, which will begin in late January 2012, will be centered around book reading and discussion sessions that will be free and open to all students and community members.

"We want to reach out and get the public interested in the subject. Key West is unique and experienced the Civil War in a unique way; it's the only southern city that was occupied by Union troops from the



beginning of the war and it became very important in terms of catching blockade runners."

Farrell regularly maximizes the rich history of Key West to teach her students. Specifically, her Oral and Community History course includes a sequence of field trips touring spots like the Customs House, Fort Zachary Taylor, the East and West Martello Towers, the Key West Cemetery, Fort Jefferson, and the African Slave Ship Cemetery.

"They actually experience history by being on the physical site. It makes it more real."

Farrell also holds lively student debates to make history seem more real and relevant. It requires students to go beyond rote memorization and really think critically about the matter and its significance and impact on history.

"I would like them to understand that what is happening in the world today has its roots in history. To better understand what is happening now, you should look back. The critical thinking skills they develop will help them examine what they read in the newspapers. It will ultimately make them better citizens."
